

East Face Vegetation Management Project

Recreation Effects Analysis

Introduction

The following analysis describes the effects of implementing the actions in the East Face project on recreation resources and permitted special uses. The analysis area for determining direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on these resources is the project area boundary.

Alternative Overview

Alternative 1 – No Action.

Alternative 2 - Approximately 12.62 miles of temporary roads would be constructed to facilitate harvest systems under Alternative 2. Additionally, approximately 107 miles of currently closed roads would be reopened to facilitate harvest and fuel reduction activities. In general, all temporary roads would be obliterated and all reopened roads would be closed after project completion. Roads 7312100 and 7312400 would remain open after project completion.

Alternative 3 - No new temporary roads would be constructed, and no closed roads identified as overgrown would be reopened to facilitate management activities. In general, all reopened roads would be closed after project completion. Roads 7312100 and 7312400 would remain open after project completion.

The forest plan amendment proposed in Alternative 3 would still allow for treatment of fuels in and around the MA-6 acreage in the Anthony Lakes WUI. Fuel reduction treatments in this area will help minimize the risk of large-scale wildfires destroying the recreation-related infrastructure within the WUI.

Alternative 4 - Approximately 2.62 miles of new temporary roads would be constructed. An additional 38.6 miles of closed roads would be reopened to facilitate management activities. In general, all temporary roads would be obliterated and all reopened roads would be closed after project completion. Roads 7312100 and 7312400 would remain open after project completion.

Alternative 5 - Approximately 14.71 miles of temporary roads would be constructed. An additional 122.7 miles of closed roads would be reopened to facilitate management activities. In general, all temporary roads would be obliterated and all reopened roads would be closed after project completion. Roads 7312100 and 7312400 would remain open after project completion and the closure period for the Indian Creek-Gorham Butte and Clear Creek Cooperative Closure areas would be expanded to include all big game hunting seasons.

Table 1 – Overview of East Face Alternative Treatment Acres

Alternative Elements	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5
Total Harvest/Noncommercial Treatment Acres	0	17,098	13,654	16,500	18,036
Harvest Treatment Acres (total)	0	6,722	3,879	2,844	10,221
Noncommercial Treatment Acres (total)	0	10,376	9,775	13,656	7,815
Prescribed Fire (Acres)	0	6,685	6,043	6,643	6,685

No Direct or Indirect Effects

The following activities associated with the East Face project are of such limited and constrained nature that they would not be easily seen upon implementation and therefore have no effect on Recreation resources or activities.

- Planting
- Whipfelling
- Hand treatments within RHCAs
- Mechanical control lines for burning
- Invasive species treatments
- Connective corridors
- Snag retention
- Roadside hazard tree removal
- Whitebark Pine treatments
- Prescribed burning

These activities and their effects will not be discussed further in this report.

Direct and Indirect Effects to Recreation

ALTERNATIVE 1 – No Action

There would be no direct or indirect effects under Alternative 1 to recreation resources. Vegetation densities or characteristics would not be modified and the forest would continue to be influenced by natural processes and limited management actions, such as fire suppression. Because no management activities would result under this alternative, no change is anticipated in the number of visitors, frequency or season use in dispersed recreation activities, developed recreation sites, trails, or permitted uses. Recreational visits within the project area would remain near the same levels as previous years and under this alternative traditional use patterns and recreational opportunities would not be affected. Hunting, hiking and other dispersed recreation and permitted uses access and opportunities are expected to remain unchanged.

In the long term, there is an increasing risk to forested areas by insect and disease epidemics and greater fuel loads increasing the risk of large stand replacement fires. Depending on where they may occur, these types of events have to large potential to negatively impact recreation resources and permitted uses within the project area for many years following the event. The effects of the

1960 Anthony Burn are still being realized within the project area in terms of acres of thickets of lodgepole pine which severely restrict access on foot or with a vehicle.

ACTION ALTERNATIVES (Alternatives 2-5)

The following describes the direct and indirect effects of implementing Alternatives 2-5 on dispersed recreation, developed recreation, developed trails, and permitted use resources.

Dispersed Recreation - Timber harvest, post-harvest, and prescribed fire activities may restrict user access into a treatment unit due to safety purposes, or users may be discouraged from entering a unit due to the presence of equipment and workers. This may occur in peak summer visitations or during the fall hunting seasons. Downed trees, slash piles, loss of forest-products (i.e. mushrooms, berries), active fire and residual smoke would also discourage visitor use in an area. Noise and other disturbances may affect the quality of the recreation experience for an individual regardless of the proximity to the activity.

A change in natural features or landscape characteristics may elicit different responses in visitors. A visitor's sense of place includes attachments to external factors like natural features or landscape characteristics. Important landscape features may consist of large old growth trees and groves, variety of trees species, an open or closed tree canopy, rock formations, water bodies, and natural appearing openings. The proposed treatments such as harvesting trees, reducing slash or altering canopy cover would change or remove some of these natural features. In some cases the changing landscape would displace or discourage certain types of dispersed recreational activities (i.e. studying nature, viewing wildlife). In other areas it may encourage new dispersed recreational activities (i.e. big game hunting, photography) not available under the previous landscape.

Alternatives 5, 2, and 4 have the most acres of commercial, non-commercial, and prescribed burning (Table 1); therefore these alternatives have the highest potential to impact dispersed recreation as described above. Alternative 3 treats the least number of acres and has a lower potential to impact dispersed recreation.

Direct effects to recreationists accessing dispersed camps in the project area or other areas would occur on roads during haul periods. The presence of large trucks or an increased frequency of traffic may discourage road use to these sites until the road work subsides. When roads are being constructed/reconstructed visitors may expect delays or closures during work periods. Road 7312150 will be closed at the conclusion of the project, which would have a direct effect on dispersed car camping along North Fork Anthony Creek.

The system of closed roads frequently ridden by mountain bikers near Gorham Butte would be affected by management activities. Effects to the system might range from widening of grown-in roads to complete obliteration of trails. Effects could last from a few months to several years depending on their severity. Portions of the following roads are currently used as a mountain bike trail system and could be affected by project activities: 7315, 7315030, 7315035, 7315040, 7315045, 7315047, 7315048, 7315090, 7312, 7312031, 7312032, 7312033, 7312034, 7312035.

Due to the quantity of roads either built or re-opened under Alternative 5 (137 miles), Alternative 2 (113 miles), Alternative 3 (67 miles), and Alternative 4 (41 miles), OHV use could increase

throughout the project area. Although the roads would technically be closed at the conclusion of the project, it is unlikely that OHV use on the roadbeds would cease at that time unless significant obliteration was undertaken. Additionally, a more open forest type adjacent to these roads would increase the frequency and ease of cross-country OHV travel after the completion of the East Face project completion where more of this would happen in those alternatives which treat more acres.

Developed Recreation - Although similar to the effects of dispersed recreation, developed recreation is more extensive due to the number of sites in East Face. Access to developed sites may be delayed or restricted during haul periods, or road construction. The presence of large log trucks and other equipment on haul routes may discourage users from driving the main access route to developed sites or other associated activities outside of the developed recreation area. The noise, dust, smoke and equipment activity during harvest, post-harvest and prescribed fires may affect the quality of the recreation experience for a visitor regardless of the proximity to the activity. The frequency and intensity of these activities may vary from a few hours to several weeks. Some loss or change of vistas, scenery, natural features or wildlife viewing opportunities may result with the vegetation treatments and prescribed fire activities visible from the developed sites.

Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 have the most potential to impact the public accessing developed recreation sites because they commercially treat the most acres along the Anthony Lakes Highway while Alternative 3 commercially treats fewer acres within this corridor.

Developed Trails – Access to popular trailheads along the Anthony Lakes Highway might be delayed or restricted during haul periods or road construction. In general, the East Face Project Area encompasses very little of the system trails originating near Anthony Lakes, so direct effects to the trails will be extremely limited in scope. As with the developed recreation sites above, Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 have the most potential to impact the public accessing developed trails because they commercially treat the most acres along the Anthony Lakes Highway while Alternative 3 commercially treats fewer acres within this corridor.

Under any of the action alternatives, if winter logging is done using the 4300, 4300020, 4315, 4316, 4330, 7312, 4380 roads, use would be coordinated with the District Recreation Manager to designate an alternative snowmobile route while log haul is occurring.

Permitted Uses - All permitted uses are authorized under the term and conditions of a permit which allow activities not available to a non-permitted user. Most of these uses are tied to road access, and the removal of forest products is dependent on specific areas or vegetation. Permitted uses may be affected by project activities. Similar to dispersed recreation, timber harvest, post-harvest, and prescribed fire activities have short term effects and may restrict or discourage entry into a harvest unit. Depending on the level of treatment activity, permit users may be displaced to other areas inside or outside of the East Face area. Increased obstacles like downed trees and slash piles, or changes in stand conditions (through burning and changing stand densities) could modify opportunities for gathering forest-products (i.e. mushrooms, berries). Residual smoke, dust, fire, noise and equipment activity is not conducive to a quality recreation experience. The same effects for road use described in 'Dispersed Recreation' are also applicable to this recreation use. If roads are used for winter haul, they may be available for access by winter recreationist like Christmas

tree cutters who normally do not have access in many roads during the winter due to deep snow packs.

Long term effects of harvest and post-harvest treatments would solicit various responses from permit users. Permit holders like mushroom pickers, would find short term benefits from open, disturbed mixed-conifer forest stands, whereas berry pickers may view the loss of some berry patches as a negative effect.

Alternative 3 proposes the fewest treatments adjacent to the powerline ROW corridor near FSR 73. Although permitted fuel and hazard tree reduction activities would still take place within the corridor, this Alternative 3 provides the least comprehensive protection against wildland fire overtaking the infrastructure within the ROW. Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 provide fairly comprehensive protection to this corridor.

All action alternatives allow for fuel reductions in MA6 increasing the resiliency around the Floodwater Flats Recreation Residence tract and the Anthony Lakes WUI. However, Alternative 3 would not provide as much protection to most of the Anthony Lakes recreation area in the event of a wildfire because it treats fewer acres adjacent to the recreation area than the other action alternatives.

Cumulative Effects on Recreation

Past projects and actions which have affected recreation uses include timber harvest, road construction, and recreation uses and have been incorporated into the existing condition for this project. Refer to Appendix D for a full description of present and reasonably foreseeable future activities.

Alternative 1

There are no cumulative effects associated with this alternative on recreation resources or permitted uses.

Alternatives 2-5

This project in combination with current projects have a slight potential to influence dispersed recreation activities by displacing big game hunters, berry pickers, open areas for viewing scenery, etc. Road decommissioning in this project will have a slight impact on motorized use, including closing access to dispersed camping areas; however, leaving roads 7312100 and 7312400 open after project completion will offset some of these impacts. The Forest Travel Management Plan (TMP) has the most potential to impact motorized and non-motorized users as it will designate roads, trails, and areas where the public may recreate with their motor vehicles. Restrictions on cross-country motor vehicle travel could reduce the effect to non-motorized recreation activities from the sight, sound and emissions of vehicles. It may also impact special uses such as firewood gathering and dispersed camping. Cross-country travel restrictions while possibly impacting firewood gathering, would provide additional protection to snags which may be more available due to the more open nature of the treated stands post-harvest and slash treatments.

Although this project area does not physically overlap in time and space with the Limber Jim/Muir Fuels Reduction project, there is a potential for smoke generated during prescribed burning activities in the Limber Jim project to combine with smoke from East Face burning and impact campers and people using the East Face area.

With the exception of the power line, East Face project activities in combination with the remainder of the special uses within the project area do not create a cumulative impact on recreation or permitted uses.

East Face fuel reduction activities in combination with the power line fuel reduction activities would increase the effectiveness of reducing fire behavior along the power lines. More fuel reduction activities occur in Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 than under Alternative 3.

East Face fuel reduction activities in combination with cabin owner fuel reduction activities will increase the effectiveness of reducing fire behavior adjacent to Floodwater Flats recreation residences.

Once implemented, the travel management plan would manage cross-country motor vehicle use even in areas where the fuel reduction activities have reduced obstacles and motor vehicles could travel. It will also enhance the effectiveness of the regulated cooperative closure areas within the project area and reduce potential user conflicts enhancing non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Log truck traffic and resurfacing activities could create long delays for recreationists coming into the area during the summer months. It could also result in some additional safety hazards along the 73 road for motorists especially during a busy summer season.

Fuel reduction activities and opening closed roads could provide more access for cattle to areas within the East Face area and could end up with cattle within dispersed camp sites or developed areas.

Extension of the closure period in Alternative 5 in the cooperative closure areas would improve non-motorized hunting experiences while reducing some opportunities for motorized hunting during all big game hunting seasons. There would be no change in these areas under Alternatives 2, 3, or 4.

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